

**LAWYERS CONCERNED FOR LAWYERS  
A 30 YEAR PARTNERSHIP WITH THE BAR**

By Ted Collins<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years of answering telephone and personal requests for help on substance and mental health problems, finds Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL) invigorated and renewed in its self-imposed tasks. Now funded in part by a portion of the fees paid by lawyers to regulate the profession, LCL has grown from the small group of ambitious lawyers who first met with Judge Emerson in 1976 to a professionally staffed organization supported by a backbone of hundreds of members and volunteers.

Judge Emerson's idea, unsuccessful in California, was transplanted to Minnesota in 1976. Up to this time, lawyers had done a good job in Minnesota to protect clients and the profession through such measures as mandatory Continuing Legal Education and establishment of the Lawyers Board, Client Security Fund and IOLTA. Judge Emerson's idea involved lawyers in recovery reaching out to help chemically dependent lawyers, to the great benefit of the lawyers, clients, and the profession. With the support of the bench and bar, both human and financial, and by increasing the visibility and achievements of the program, LCL helped spawn similar programs in nearly every state. The American Bar Association (ABA) has assisted also through the Commission on Lawyers Assistance Programs, an overreaching entity (CoLAP) which shares information, coordinates educational programs, and provides education, outreach, and resources to the law students, judges, and members of the bar as well as bar and disciplinary authorities,

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and inspects and reports on programs if requested. Minnesota's program was favorably inspected by CoLAP in 2004.

Minnesota's program passed its next milestone in partnership with the MSBA. The work of the MSBA Life & the Law Committee's Depression Task Force culminated in a Petition to establish and fund a Lawyer Assistance Program funded with lawyer registration fees. The Supreme Court approved the Petition in 1999. LCL has administered the Lawyer Assistance Program since 2001 and receives approximately 75 % of its core LAP funding from lawyer registration fees.

LCL operates as a first call for help for lawyers, judges, and law students and those affected by their problems. Referrals to professionals are made for chemical dependency assessments, chemical dependency treatment, other addictions and mental health services. Intervention and active support to address chemical dependency, mental health, and other concerns is provided by volunteers and staff of LCL. Every attorney, judge, and law student in Minnesota is entitled to four free sessions of professional counseling when needed. Intake, follow up, coordination of volunteers, and education and outreach in every available avenue, from five minute public service announcements to continuing legal education programs for ethics, elimination of bias and general credit on topics ranging from quality of life/balance to programs such as the daylong program on "When Lawyers Cannot or Should Not Practice" occupy our professional staff and our committed volunteers.

As Minnesota's LAP, LCL has been able to expand our reach and help our colleagues overcome mental illness in the same manner we have helped our colleagues suffering from

addiction. LCL received served 249 new calls and made 99 referrals in 2005-2006. This represented an approximately 54% increase in the number of lawyers, judges, and law students we served the year before. LCL staff and volunteers made 363 program appearances before 5415 people, 1766 of whom were law students.

None of this growth and acceptance would have happened without LCL's cornerstone—confidentiality. Nothing made known to LCL is ever disclosed to any authority or other person outside of the organization, and all information within the organization is kept strictly confidential. The point of LCL was and is to help the lawyer, judge or law student by appropriate means, leaving to others any other aspects of the lawyer's problems.

The founders fund, established to honor original members Derck Amerman and Jerry Freeman is one of the most recent innovations of LCL. Through it, LCL hopes to be able to fund, on a repayment promise, appropriate treatment of lawyers who would otherwise not get help. In this, the original intent (to use a current phrase) of the 1976 meeting will be realized—help for colleagues in the profession.